

METHODOLOGY

10. When the study started there was no existing body of information which gave a complete picture of the present position on technical and commercial qualifications and examinations in the developing countries of the Commonwealth. The first priority therefore was to establish, in broad terms, what was actually happening. It was hoped that in doing this a number of the problems could be identified, but it was always envisaged that this would be a preliminary study, to be followed up in due course with more detailed ones.

11. Initially, the following methodology was adopted:

(a) A questionnaire was sent to all Ministries of Education and to as many colleges as could be identified in the developing countries of the Commonwealth.

(b) Contact was made with two regional examining councils: the West Africa Examinations Council and the East African Examinations Council.

(c) Statistical information on examination candidates from those countries was obtained for the 1977/78 academic year from the City and Guilds of London Institute (C & G), the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and the Union of Lancashire and Cheshire Institutes (ULCI). Statistical information, although not in a compatible form, was also provided by Pitmans Examination Institute.

(d) Discussions were held with the Secretaries or other senior staff of the UK examining bodies listed above, and with other people with experience of examining systems and of technical education in the Commonwealth.

12. As the study progressed it became apparent that many of the problems which developing countries might be having with qualifications and examinations were those inherent in the award of qualifications and the conduct of examinations, exacerbated by a number of factors relating to the developing countries themselves. It therefore seemed sensible, as part of the study, to provide analyses of the operational requirements of vocational qualifications and examinations, of the principles of costing such operations, and of the special factors which affect qualifications and examinations in developing countries.

The nature of the evidence

13. The study has thus generated different types of evidence:

(a) the factual position revealed by the questionnaire responses

(b) the opinions, especially on outside examinations, set out in the questionnaire responses and quoted in Appendix II

- (c) the statistics collected from the examining bodies
- (d) the analyses undertaken by GES on the basis of 'in house' experience and outside discussions
- (e) information obtained from the regional examining councils
- (f) the discussions with the senior officers of the UK examining bodies, and others.

14. In a preliminary study of this nature it is to be expected that some conclusions particularly on matters of fact, will be very well founded; that others may be more tentative; and that others again will be speculative but still may be of value as hypotheses to be checked in further studies. It is important that the reader should be able to distinguish which is which. This is particularly so as the origin of the study calls for broad generalisations applicable to the developing Commonwealth countries as a whole rather than to individual states.

15. Extracts from the questionnaire are given in Appendix I. It was posted at the beginning of June 1979 by the Commonwealth Secretariat to 42 Ministries of Education and to 185 colleges and polytechnics.

16. The questionnaire fell into two parts. In Part I respondents were asked to indicate the courses offered by subject area and level and type of qualification. For the purpose of the questionnaire a wide range of technical and commercial subjects were listed in 32 groups, and a facility for writing in additional courses was also provided. In the event the only major groups of subjects found to be omitted were Shipbuilding and Boatbuilding, and those relating to sea-going personnel.

17. In the questionnaire technical qualifications and examinations were divided into three levels, which fell between but did not include trade tests at one end of the scale and university level awards at the other.

Higher Technician: Typified by C & G Technicians Part 3 or the Higher Technician Diploma. Also included some of the awards of professional and similar bodies if they were below graduate level. Technical management studies were also included at this level.

Technician: Typified by C & G Technicians Part 1 and 2 or the Ordinary Technician Diploma. General Courses and Supervisory Studies were included at this level.

Craft: All levels of C & G Craft courses. Also included Mechanics and Operatives work.

Similarly commercial qualifications were divided into three levels, roughly corresponding with those adopted by the RSA and the LCCI.

Stage III: Advanced
 Stage II : Intermediate
 Stage I : Elementary

18. Qualifications were analysed into four types:

- (a) Qualifications awarded by LOCAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (e.g. a polytechnic or a college).
- (b) NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS awarded by a Government Department or National Body.
- (c) REGIONAL QUALIFICATIONS awarded by a regional examining council in which several countries participate.
- (d) OUTSIDE QUALIFICATIONS, awarded by institutions completely outside the nation or region including both those awarded by such bodies as City and Guilds, the Royal Society of Arts, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and also those awarded by, say, American universities to students in some Caribbean colleges. Where outside qualifications were used, respondents were asked to indicate on a five point scale their judgement of the appropriateness of the examination syllabus to local employment requirements.

19. In Part II of the questionnaire Ministries and colleges were asked to give information on any recent or forthcoming changes in policy concerning technical or commercial qualifications or examinations; the reasons for using outside qualifications; and to make any other comment on technical or commercial qualifications which might be useful.

20. Completed questionnaires (or letters in lieu) were returned by 86 respondents in 35 countries. The responses gave a very helpful broad picture of the present position in the developing Commonwealth, both in the detailed subject information and in their illuminating comments.

21. Where more than one questionnaire was returned from a country, whether these included a Department of Education and one or more educational establishments, or just the latter, it was remarkable how the impressions they gave agreed with each other. Moreover, in many cases, the impression given by the questionnaires was confirmed by the detailed information collected from the UK examining bodies and by discussions with their senior officers. The survey by questionnaire therefore enables broad generalisations to be made about the present use of college, national, regional and outside examinations.

22. The comments expressed in the responses to the questionnaire were often illuminating and interesting; a selection is given in Appendix II. Some of them directed the investigators to points which might otherwise have been missed. However, there are limitations:

- (a) They are expressions of opinion, and one can only speculate whether similar opinions would have been expressed by respondents from establishments which did not return the questionnaire.

- (b) The main priority of the questionnaire was to establish the facts of the present position, and it was not an appropriate medium for identifying any particular problems being experienced with college, national or regional examinations. Any information on these points has been fortuitous and is of limited application only.

(c) Because of the wording of the questionnaire, most of the opinions quoted relate to the use or replacement of outside examinations. Appendix II could therefore give the impression that these are the sole issues, whereas there are others which did not emerge because of the way in which the questionnaire was designed.

Examining Body Statistics

23. The information collected from the examining bodies was based on the number of candidates who actually sat the examination (rather than those who had entered and for whom question papers were provided), and the number who had passed. No attempt was made to differentiate between single subject examinations and those in which there were several question papers. The definition of what constituted an examination was that of the examining body.

24. The information collected was then collated into the same definitions of subject area and level as were used in the questionnaire. For example technician level in Electronics and Telecommunications included the results of nearly 40 City and Guilds examinations. Similarly, where examinations were taken at different times during the year the statistics were aggregated to obtain a total picture for the complete academic year. This information has been deposited with the Commonwealth Secretariat.

25. Detailed statistics collected from examining bodies are accurate, but far too complex to be reproduced in full. The process of reducing them to intelligible summaries inevitably reduces the validity of the statistics as it involves grouping together the results of different examinations with separate structures, and the examination results of countries with different educational and cultural traditions. Nevertheless it does enable some broad generalisations to be made, which help identify some of the problems.

26. Other limitations on the use of these statistics include:

(a) the impossibility in the majority of cases of relating them directly to the establishments which completed and returned questionnaires, as in all commercial examinations and in many technical ones there is a single national entry through the Department of Education;

(b) the fact that they only refer to candidates who actually sat the examinations, and do not include information on those who entered for examinations but never actually sat.

Discussions with Examining Body Secretaries

27. The purpose of discussions with the Secretaries (or other senior staff) of the examining bodies was to

(a) obtain an understanding of their view of their present role in providing examinations for developing countries;

(b) identify any problems which they were meeting in fulfilling their present role;

(c) explore, without commitment, how far they would be prepared to change their role in future if this became desirable.